



The Importance of Conscious Parenting in Raising Confident Muslims

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Introduction

Is there a connection between parent behavior that contradicts their professed religious beliefs and the eventual outcome of atheism in their children? This question was the subject of a recent study conducted with over five thousand participants from diverse backgrounds, all of whom identified as atheists. All of the participants had some form of religious upbringing yet, at some point, chose to reject the faith they were raised with. The findings of the study, published in the journal *Religion, Brain, & Behavior*, became the impetus for this paper.¹ The research suggests a correlation between parental behavior and the onset of atheism in their children. “People tend to become atheists at a younger age when their religious parents talk the talk but don’t walk the walk...The study provides evidence that exposure to religiously-motivated actions plays an important role in the onset of atheism.”² This study focused solely on those who left their faith and the age at which they did so. While it does not include analysis and comparison of those who remained true to their faiths, it does provide valuable insight into the crucial role and influence parents have on the religious beliefs of their children.

Parenting objectives

Leaving one’s religion is a grave matter for faith-based communities as a whole. This is certainly true for Muslims who believe that our purpose and salvation is centered on belief in and worship of the one true God. Naturally, we as parents are most concerned with providing for and nurturing our children. Typically, this necessitates a focus on their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing, along with their educational needs (both religious and secular). Parents hope to raise responsible, confident individuals who will reflect their upbringing and contribute

¹ Joseph Langston, David Speed & Thomas J. Coleman III (2018) Predicting age of atheism: credibility enhancing displays and religious importance, choice, and conflict in family of upbringing, *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, DOI: 10.1080/2153599X.2018.1502678

² Dolan, Eric W. "How Parents Act on Their Religious Beliefs Linked to the Onset of Atheism in Their Children." PsyPost. August 26, 2018. Accessed October 05, 2018. <https://www.psypost.org/2018/08/how-parents-act-on-their-religious-beliefs-linked-to-the-onset-of-atheism-in-their-children-52058>.

to society in productive ways. While each of these parenting objectives is important in and of itself, it is the level of prioritization and care given to each one that is influenced greatly by our own surroundings and experiences—that of an increasingly secular and materialistic world imposing constant demands on our time and energy. Factors such as higher divorce rates, single parenting, and parents who do not share the same religious beliefs will further shape the approach to parenting. The amount of time spent out of the house, on social media, and on entertainment, in place of quality face-to-face family time all have an impact on one's parenting methods. In addition to these factors, the global decline of morality has perhaps the greatest overarching influence on parenting today.

Implications for Muslim parents

The Muslim community is not immune to these factors, and studies are showing that we face many of the same religious and social challenges as our counterparts across the globe. 23% of Muslims in America no longer identify with Islam, half of whom choose to not affiliate with any religion, joining the fastest growing global group today.³ Studies are showing that Muslims are experiencing an increasing faith crisis as is the case among other religious groups. Furthermore, among the foremost cited reasons that lead to doubt and abandonment of Islam is the behavior of Muslims themselves, in terms of personal conduct, misinterpretation, and misconstruing Islam.⁴

No doubt, parents are the first and primary influence in a child's life. Hence, the greatest and most important provision of all to come from parents, that of instilling faith, may take a direction of its own—even in religious households. It is noteworthy that the same study also found that "...religious individuals who were exposed to high levels of CREDs [*credibility-enhancing displays*] by their parents

³ Mohamed, Besheer, Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac. "Islam Gains about as Many Converts as It Loses in U.S." Pew Research Center. January 26, 2018. Accessed March 05, 2019.
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/26/the-share-of-americans-who-leave-islam-is-offset-by-those-who-become-muslim/>.

⁴ <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/youssef-chouhoud/modern-pathways-to-doubt-in-islam/>
<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/youssef-chouhoud/what-causes-muslims-to-doubt-islam-a-quantitative-analysis/>

were more likely to report believing in the existence of God with high certainty.”⁵ A practical example of a CRED is seen in parents who worship with the same commitment and regularity they teach and expect from their child. Additionally, CREDs are formed and reinforced through other religiously and morally driven actions and interactions of the parents, such as being consistently truthful, charitable, and just—at home, in the workplace, and in social settings.

What is the solution? Simply put, Islamic principles and values are timeless, comprehensive, and holistic in regard to all of life’s experiences and challenges, including those that come with parenting. The findings of this study corroborate in many ways Islamic teachings in regard to the relationship between parents and the effective transmission of faith to their children. A number of arguments can be made in favor of the Islamic approach to parenting to safeguard against the unfavorable findings of this study. The first and most obvious one is the need for parents to actively nurture faith from birth. This is the essential first step on the path to raising the next generation of confident Muslims who will be equipped with sound knowledge, conviction in their belief and practice of Islam, and upright and empathetic character. It is this moral and religious foundation that will enable and motivate them to contribute to society in productive and meaningful ways. This paper serves as a primer to the topic of parenting in Islam by addressing its foremost aspect—that of the role of the behavior of parents in instilling faith in their children.

The parent-child relationship is built upon faith at its core

Islam assigns parents guardianship and primary responsibility for their children in terms of the child’s physical, emotional, *and* spiritual wellbeing. Parenting in Islam is part of one’s personal accountability and servitude to Allah through one’s virtuous conduct and service to His creation. This was taught and exemplified by

⁵ Dolan, Eric W. "How Parents Act on Their Religious Beliefs Linked to the Onset of Atheism in Their Children." PsyPost. August 26, 2018. Accessed October 05, 2018. <https://www.psypost.org/2018/08/how-parents-act-on-their-religious-beliefs-linked-to-the-onset-of-atheism-in-their-children-52058>.

the Prophet ﷺ who said that “...a man is a shepherd in charge of the inhabitants of his household and he is responsible for his flock; a woman is a shepherdess in charge of her husband's house and children and she is responsible for them...”⁶ This obligation carries with it the noble charge of safeguarding the faith of one's children and, in turn, that of future generations to come and society at large. Parenting is from the abundant provisions and blessings from Allah. As with every blessing, it is also part of the test of life in this world—one that demands sincere effort and gratitude at all times, for which there is, in turn, tremendous reward from Allah. The Qur'an states, “And know that your properties and your children are but a trial and that Allah has with Him a great reward.”⁷ Allah acknowledges the commitment and the sacrifice parents make in this selfless endeavor by honoring them with the highest regard, after Allah and the Prophet ﷺ.

And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months. [He grows] until, when he reaches maturity and reaches [the age of] forty years, he says, ‘My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to work righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims.’⁸

The foundation for sound parenting in the Qur'an and Sunnah

The foundation for sound parenting is clearly established in the Qur'an and Sunnah. We are given instruction and lessons through the narratives of the noble prophets and believers, such as those of Ibrahim, Yaqub, and Luqman عليهم السلام. Detailed accounts are found in the biography (*seerah*) and methodology of the final Prophet, Muhammad ﷺ. They embody the importance of teaching the Oneness

⁶ *Sunan Abi Dawud* 2928, *Sahih Al-Albani*, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/20/1>

⁷ Qur'an, 8:28, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/8/28>

⁸ Qur'an, 46:15, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/46/15>

of Allah (*tawhid*), sincerity in all affairs concerning worship and worldly matters (*ikhlas*), good character (*akhlaq*), etiquette and the appropriate response in all situations (*adab*) within the Islamic framework of justice and compassion. These parenting goals are emphasized in sacred text as part of the thorough and complete guide to humanity as to how to prioritize the needs of the child in order to ensure spiritual and physical wellbeing in this world as well as ultimate success in the Hereafter. As with every deliberate action we undertake, parenting requires sincere intention. This is demonstrated through supplications (*du'a*) for one's offspring, even prior to conception, throughout life and for future generations to come. Of the beautiful examples of this in the Qur'an is the supplication of the mother of Maryam who sought protection in Allah from the evils of Shaytan for her unborn child and the future progeny to come.⁹

Explicit parenting advice is found in Surah Luqman in the form of Luqman's words to his son:

And We had certainly given Luqman wisdom [and said], 'Be grateful to Allah.' And whoever is grateful is grateful for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever denies [His favor]—then indeed, Allah is Free of need and Praiseworthy.

And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, 'O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.' And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination. But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me [in repentance]. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do. [And Luqman said], 'O my son, indeed if wrong should be the weight of a mustard seed and should be within a rock or [anywhere] in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is Subtle and Acquainted. O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be

⁹ Qur'an, 3:36, "...and I seek refuge for her in You and [for] her descendants from Satan, the expelled [from the mercy of Allah]," *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/3/36>

patient over what befalls you. Indeed, [all] that is of the matters [requiring] determination. And do not turn your cheek [in contempt] toward people and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful. And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys.’

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These verses of the Qur’an contain instruction, wisdom, and advice on servitude to and worship of Allah. They provide guidance as to how to interact with His creation with confidence, perseverance, and humility. Of their many benefits, they highlight the perfection and balanced, holistic nature of Islam. The Qur’an is not only the source of guidance to strengthen one’s own faith; it also teaches how to build a loving bond with one’s children and how to instill faith in them. It is this prescription that enables children to grow into exemplary Muslims, who in turn becomes a means of reward for their parents. The Prophet ﷺ said, “When a person dies, all action is cut off for him with the exception of three things: *sadaqa* [charity] which continues, knowledge which benefits, or a righteous child who makes supplication for him.”¹¹

All humans are born on the *fitrah*

The concept of the *fitrah* is mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah as the innate aspect of human nature each of us is born with. The *fitrah* is naturally inclined toward the worship of Allah and toward morality.¹² When parents provide the ideal environment in which to strengthen and maintain the child’s natural disposition to believe in Allah and to live by the moral compass and guidance Islam provides, the *fitrah* will remain strong and protected from corruption, enabling the child to remain steadfast in faith and practice.

Research in the area of childhood psychology has shown that children, from the earliest stages of development, exhibit an inclination toward good over evil, toward

¹⁰ Qur’an, 31:12-19, <https://quran.com/31/12-19>

¹¹ *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* 38, *Sahih Al-Albani*, <https://sunnah.com/adab/1/38>

¹² Qur’an, 30:30-33, “So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the *fitrah* of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know...,” *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/30/30-32>

justice, kindness, and empathy for others. “Humans are predisposed by their *fitrah* to find purpose and prosperity in the world, so they cry for guidance and care, observe their surroundings, interpret their environment with causation and deduction, seek morally upright patterns of behaviour, and yearn for an existence worthy of God’s friendship...The *fitrah* is thus comprised of a conceptual apparatus with ethical, spiritual, and intellectual processing functions by which the external reality is rendered meaningful, and life’s journey towards God is appropriately conceived.”¹³ Another manifestation of the *fitrah* is described in the Qur’an as man’s natural instinct to call upon Allah in moments of helplessness and the dire need for divine intervention.¹⁴

What can go wrong?

So what can go wrong to corrupt the *fitrah* and take the child away from the path of faith? One narration of the Prophet ﷺ speaks directly to the role of the parents. He ﷺ said, “No child is born except on *Al-Fitra* (Islam) and then his parents make him Jewish, Christian or Magian, as an animal produces a perfect young animal: do you see any part of its body amputated?”¹⁵ This *hadith* affirms two fundamental truths: firstly, that children are born with the inclination to recognize and worship Allah, after which secondly, they come under the influence of their parents who will either nurture that inclination or teach them to reject it. Hence, in Islam, parents shoulder the primary responsibility for providing their children the optimal means to strengthen and maintain their faith. Islam teaches us that the *fitrah* remains susceptible to constant attack from the Shaytan.¹⁶ He will attempt to lead us astray through every means available in the daily interactions we

¹³ Khan, M. Nazir, Dr. “Fitrah – The Primordial Nature of Man,” Spiritual Perception. January 01, 2015. Accessed March 05, 2019. <http://spiritualperception.org/fitrah-the-primordial-nature-of-man/>.

¹⁴ Qur’an, 31:32, “And when waves come over them like canopies, they supplicate to Allah, sincere to Him in religion. But when He delivers them to the land, there are [some] of them who are moderate [in faith]. And none rejects Our signs except everyone treacherous and ungrateful,” *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/31/32>

¹⁵ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, Book 60, Hadith 298, <https://sunnah.com/urn/44530>

¹⁶ Qur’an, 7:16-17, “[Satan] said, “Because You have put me in error, I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left, and You will not find most of them grateful [to You],” *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/7/16-17>

have with the world at large, including those people in close proximity to us who have the greatest capacity to influence our spirituality and faith—our own parents.

*The servants of God are inherently compelled by their fitrah to love God, though amongst them are those who corrupt this fitrah... and this love of God intensifies according to one's knowledge of Him and the soundness of one's fitrah. And it diminishes with diminished knowledge, and the pollution of one's fitrah with corruptive vain desires.*¹⁷

Self-esteem and a confident Muslim identity

The impact of Islamophobia and other factors

The term *internalized Islamophobia* denotes the harmful impact of Islamophobia on Muslims—one that takes a firm grip within the individual, creating fear, doubt, and, eventually, distance from God and religion.¹⁸ This is just one factor today on the spectrum of prevalent root causes, both from outside and from within the home, that can have detrimental effects on one's self-esteem and faith. Each of these factors, often traumatic, is deserving of its own discourse beyond that of this paper.¹⁹ However, parents play a crucial role in overcoming these challenges, given the impact on the child's self-esteem and faith. It is paramount that parents create a strong foundation and proper understanding of Islam in regard to the child's core beliefs (*aqeedah*). They must provide the correct contextualized lens through which to apply those beliefs in every aspect of daily life, as is the goal of every conscientious Muslim. Experiencing life through the lens of the Qur'an and the Sunnah both strengthens the Muslim identity as well as provides the appropriate response to every situation, be that situation one that supports or challenges the core identity.

¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar' ta'arud al-Aql wa'l-Naql*, <http://spiritualperception.org/fitrah-the-primordial-nature-of-man/>

¹⁸ <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/omar-suleiman/exploring-the-faith-and-identity-crisis-of-american-muslim-youth/>

¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion on trauma and its impact on faith: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/series/trauma/>

Inculcating love of Allah

It is clearly not sufficient for parents to limit the teachings and practice of Islam to ritual acts of worship in specific times and places alone, as is unfortunately widespread today. Rather, it is the awareness of Allah, His Names and Attributes, and the desire to connect with Him out of love and servitude toward Him that must be at the forefront of what is taught and applied at all times to strengthen that identity. Additionally, self-esteem is further developed from the realization that Allah bestows the most noble status on His beloved servants.²⁰ These concepts are further reinforced by parents through showing love, encouragement, and acknowledgment of the child—and, where possible, with the additional support of like-minded company. Of the core aims of Islam is to strengthen the individual both spiritually and practically by placing great emphasis on collective effort as exemplified by the prophetic model of family and community life.

The Companions as role models

Many of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ were either in the prime of their youth or children who grew up in his company. Their biographies provide abundant fruit from which to nourish young minds and to encourage them to emulate the praiseworthy character traits and conduct of these phenomenal role models who are among the best of humanity. While they exemplify faith in action, fortitude, and conviction, they were also among the foremost in their empathy and kindness. Given the self-serving, individualism-driven mindset of today, it is important to encourage these positive qualities in order to build a healthy level of self-esteem and confidence, while at the same time safeguarding against arrogance or bigotry toward others.

²⁰ Qur'an, 17:70, *Sahih International*, "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference," <https://quran.com/17/70>

Adverse effects on faith

Going back to the atheism study, we can draw parallels between the finding that loss of faith in children is linked to parental practices and the following problematic scenarios that have implications for Muslim parents:

a. When one or both parents barely practice Islam (or do not practice it at all)

Marriage and family life are central to Islamic teachings and the preservation of faith at the individual and collective level. Hence, when one or both parents is not a practicing Muslim, it is bound to have an impact on the transmission of faith to the child. Two key approaches—one preventive and the other corrective—provide the solution to safeguard the child’s faith in this scenario. The first is that of spouse selection and the importance of choosing a practicing Muslim as one’s life partner, for whom Islam is both the spiritual as well as the practical lens for all aspects of daily life and worship. The second is to remember that it is never too late to begin that journey together as parents. Instilling and nurturing faith is a work in progress for parents and children alike. The Mercy of Allah is boundless—especially for those who sincerely seek His Path.

b. The absence of active involvement of both parents working cooperatively to instill faith

Islam recognizes the individual strengths, contributions, and the role of each parent, while emphasizing the importance of working together for mutual support and benefit. This is encouraged in every aspect of the marriage, in regard to the relationship between spouses and includes the relationship with one’s children and their upbringing.

c. The assumption that children will discover their own path to faith and a failure to set and establish boundaries when it comes to religious belief ²¹

²¹ Cragun, R. T., Hammer, J. H., Nielsen, M., & Autz, N. (2018). Religious/secular distance: How far apart are teenagers and their parents? *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 10(3), 288-295. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rel0000205>

This is clearly a false assumption given that the roles and responsibilities of parents defined in the Qur'an, and exemplified by the Prophet ﷺ as detailed above, involve actively instilling faith in their children. Parenting in Islam necessitates active involvement from birth to protect and strengthen the *fitrah* and to teach, by example, the correct understanding and practice of Islam, within its established boundaries.

Additional pitfalls for Muslim parents, not directly mentioned in the study, but which can be derived from it include:

d. The assumption that Islamic schools, *masjid* programs and the like suffice as the *primary* source of Islamic education and religious upbringing (*tarbiya*)

This stems from thinking that these valuable resources are sufficient (without the reinforcement and active involvement of parents) to safeguard against the multi-faceted harmful effects of secularism, liberalism, atheism, and Islamophobia our children are heavily exposed to on a daily basis, via school, peer pressure, social media, and entertainment.

e. Prioritizing secular education over Islamic education

When secular education becomes the focal point, it sometimes replaces instilling faith and establishing a Muslim identity as the core upon which to build all knowledge and education, both religious and secular.

Knowledge is an essential tool

Parents as the primary sources of knowledge

Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim.²² Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Allah makes the way to *Jannah* easy for he who treads the path in search of knowledge.”²³ This statement contains profound

²² Qur'an, 17:36, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/17/36>, “And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned.”

²³ *Riyad As-Saliheen*, Muslim, Book 13, Hadith 6, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/13/6>

wisdom for each of us—and particularly for parents who become the first and primary source of knowledge from the moment their children enter this world. Parents provide the initial surroundings through which their children filter and absorb the world during their formative years. This happens through both parent-child interaction,²⁴ and through the child observing and imitating the behavior of their parents.

Imitation is a powerful form of learning

A study conducted at the University of Washington states, “Imitation is a powerful form of learning commonly used by children, adults, and infants. A child's enthusiasm for imitative behavior prompts parental attention and interaction, and provides a mechanism for transmitting appropriate cultural and social behavior. Although simple imitative behavior is evident in the postnatal period, by around 14 months infants remember and repeat actions they observe in adults, other children, and on television. Imitation games provide early experience in mapping the similarities between self and other. Behavioral imitation, empathy, and moral sentiments may be part of the same developmental pathway.”²⁵ Hence, children's faith and practice will reflect their parents' understanding of Islam and their parents' behavior in accordance with those beliefs—be it correct, uninformed, or misunderstood. The level of conviction with which parents are able to communicate the religion will impact the conviction and confidence of their children. In line with the atheism study, it is no surprise that parents whose behavior matched their religious beliefs were more likely to have children who continued to profess those beliefs as adolescents.

²⁴ Landry SH. The role of parents in early childhood learning. In: Tremblay RE, Boivin M, Peters RDeV, eds. Tremblay RE, topic ed. Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development [online]. <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/parenting-skills/according-experts/role-parents-early-childhood-learning>. Updated December 2014. Accessed March 6, 2019.

²⁵ Meltzoff, Andrew M. "Born to Learn: What Infants Learn from Watching Us." 1999. Accessed March 7, 2019. http://ilabs.washington.edu/meltzoff/pdf/99Meltzoff_BornToLearn.pdf.

Parenting with *ihsan* and *yaqeen*

Conveying Islam to one's child with sincerity, excellence, and due diligence (*ihsan*) means raising the bar for oneself first, to the best of one's ability. Hence, parents must be in constant search of sound knowledge to increase their own understanding and practice of Islam—in addition to acquiring secular knowledge and the necessary skills to practically navigate the world. Furthermore, one must address any questions, concerns, and doubts one may personally harbor in order to first build conviction (*yaqeen*) in oneself. This will, in turn, become a source of strength and inspiration to the child, as well as the means to tackle future challenges with confidence and clarity to help further build the child's faith and conviction.

Faith, Islam, and *imaan*

It logically follows that parents must themselves have a correct understanding of the core beliefs of Islam (*aqeedah*) as a foundation on which to build and instill faith in their children. With regard to the word *faith*, there is a theological distinction between the two Arabic words often synonymous with the English word *faith*—*Islam* and *imaan*.²⁶ The former is used in a general sense to denote the religion itself. The latter denotes a far more complex definition of faith which emanates with sincerity from the heart and influences one's speech and actions. *Imaan* is present in varying levels of strength at any given moment, such that it is entirely possible to claim and even practice Islam outwardly with little to no conviction in one's heart. Rituals such as prayer, charity, and fasting, along with morally upright actions are manifestations of *imaan* when accompanied by sincerity, as are virtuous character traits such as honesty and modesty.²⁷

²⁶ Hamdan, Aisha. *Nurturing Eemân in Children*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House. https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Nurturing_iman_In_Children.pdf, pp. 28-31

²⁷ The Prophet ﷺ said: "Faith [*imaan*] has over seventy branches or over sixty branches, the most excellent of which is the declaration that there is no god but Allah, and the humblest of which is the removal of what is injurious from the path; and modesty is the branch of faith," *Sahih Muslim*, Book 1, Hadith 60, <https://sunnah.com/muslim/1/60>

Cultural bias and societal norms

In addition to making an effort to learn and practice authentic Islam, it is just as important for parents to be aware of any cultural biases that may have shaped their understanding of Islam. These can be passed down automatically, generation to generation, often resulting in a skewed lens on one's religious beliefs and practice. It is important to note that Islam gives ample allowance for cultural norms and context. An example of this is the vast spectrum of permissible food and clothing, unique to each culture, from which to choose to eat and wear. The biases referred to here are those which exceed the limits of the religion, falling into misinterpretation and incorrect belief and practice. Additional factors that necessitate a conscientious effort to acquire sound knowledge are the rise of secularism, the call to a more progressive and reformed Islam for modern times, and the many perceived conflicts and misconceptions that have arisen as a result. All of these factors are challenging to navigate successfully without knowledge of both the correct framework of Islam, as well as an understanding of one's current context.

The need for parenting resources

No doubt, there is a need for increased community-wide awareness and resources designed specifically for parents to be better equipped to face today's challenges. Yaqeen Institute is a gateway to authentic and relevant material—as are other established and emerging Islamic organizations at the community level and via the internet. The local *masjid* may provide appropriate resources, along with the company of like-minded community members. The internet, with discernment, offers authentic and accredited programs for every category of student from the stay-at-home and working parent to those who are looking to supplement their education. Additionally, programs designed specifically to cater to families such as Islamic conferences, weekend schools, and parent support groups are also important to take advantage of. Foremost in all of these is the individual need for a daily regimen of the remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) to build a strong connection to

Him as the means to fulfilling one's purpose in life as a believer and a parent who wants to instill faith in their child.

Practice what you teach

One of the key findings of the atheism study was that in cases where parents failed to act in accordance with their professed beliefs, their children abandoned religion at a younger age. The credibility factor in parent behavior can be the difference between faith, doubt, and rejection of faith on the part of the child. From the Islamic perspective, sincerity demands one be truthful, diligent in abstaining from hypocrisy, and consistent in one's belief and practice, to the best of one's ability.²⁸ In a detailed account of the numerous levels and characteristics of hypocrisy, Ibn Al-Qayyim (d. 1350 CE) mentions that foolishness and short-sightedness are attributed to hypocrisy. Those who exhibit these characteristics lack spiritual insight and are prone to falling into doubt and following their desires. Eventually this may lead to a contradiction between belief and practice—and ultimately, to one belittling the religion.²⁹ He describes a “people prone to laziness and laxity in fulfilling the orders of the All-Merciful and because of this they find sincerity burdensome.”³⁰

And the Messenger has said, ‘O my Lord, indeed my people have taken this Qur'an as [a thing] abandoned.’³¹

Inconsistency in parent behavior feeds conflict, doubt, and lack of conviction, building the case for rejection of faith. Sadly, this has become a common phenomenon today. An obvious example of this involves parents expecting the child to observe the five daily obligatory prayers while they are inconsistent in doing so themselves. Yet, many are left wondering why the child refuses to pray or

²⁸ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith 6465, “The Prophet ﷺ was asked, ‘What deeds are loved most by Allah?’ He said, ‘The most regular constant deeds even though they may be few.’ He added, ‘Don't take upon yourselves, except the deeds which are within your ability,’” <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/81/54>

²⁹ Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah, Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr. *Characteristics of the Hypocrites*. Birmingham: Daar Us-Sunnah Publications.

<https://maktabahassunnahblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/characteristics-of-the-hypocrites.pdf>, pp. 21-28

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28, see also [4:142], “...And when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing [themselves to] the people and not remembering Allah except a little.”

³¹ Qur'an, 25:30, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/25/30>

makes excuses not to. Contradictions between faith and action may be present in other areas such as one's daily interactions and general outlook on life, be it in the workplace or social settings—all of which are observed and scrutinized by the child. This is corroborated by the recent doubt studies conducted on Muslims which point to the behavior of Muslims themselves as a leading contributing factor to doubts about Islam.³²

Extremes and reactionary responses

When action stems from inaccurate or partial knowledge, it will logically lead to misinformed decisions which may fall into unhealthy extremes when it comes to how parents behave in regard to their religious beliefs. An example of this is the liberal and progressive outlook of many parents today who diminish the importance and existence of particular boundaries set by Islam if they appear cumbersome or to conflict with current prevailing norms. This can be contrasted with the opposite extreme of falsely attributed rigidity to Islam which parents impose on their children—to the point of it leading to undue hardship and excessive control.

These skewed approaches in parent behavior will naturally have an impact on the outcome and success with which parents instill faith in their children. For instance, neglect of obligatory actions, or a focus on the outward rituals, tradition, or appearance alone in place of emphasis on the child's relationship with Allah both carry potential for great harm. Parents may unintentionally drive their child away from true faith and practice. This may either result in the child identifying with Islam primarily in a cultural or social context, or outright rejecting it out of the false perception of Islam being harsh and oppressive. Likewise, this may also lead to religious conflict within the home between parent and child. Islam places great emphasis on the importance of balance in every aspect of life, including religious practice. The key is to avoid extremes and strive for consistency, with a balance of compassion and discipline as taught and exemplified by the Prophet ﷺ.

³² <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/youssef-chouhoud/modern-pathways-to-doubt-in-islam/>
<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/youssef-chouhoud/what-causes-muslims-to-doubt-islam-a-quantitative-analysis/>

*But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet] do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters.*³³

Consolation for struggling parents

An important finding of the atheism study is that a match between professed beliefs and practices is not the only determining factor nor does it always provide a complete explanation as to why people believe or not.³⁴ This aligns with the fundamental Islamic principle that it is Divine Wisdom and the Divine Decree (*qadr* of Allah) that ultimately prevail in all matters—in this case, above and beyond the effort of the parents to instill faith in their children. Parents who find themselves in distress, faced with the reality of religious conflict or abandonment of faith by their child, are acknowledged and rewarded for their patience, steadfastness, and sincere effort to fulfill their responsibility in the sight of Allah. It is also important to acknowledge the pain and grief they experience as a consequence. Islam provides both spiritual solace and comfort in trusting the Mercy and Wisdom of Allah, as well as the guidance to seek practical solutions.³⁵ There is a tremendous need for increased awareness and for the encouragement to seek help and support from external resources as part of fulfilling the Islamic objectives of parenting and family life. This must be sought as needed through consultation with family and friends, a local imam, support groups, medical care, counseling, etc.

Undoubtedly, people encounter life-altering and, at times, traumatic experiences beyond their control. While these are acknowledged as valid factors that contribute to doubt or rejection of faith in one's child, it must also be stated that they do not point to failure on the part of the parents. Islam teaches hope in the Mercy of Allah

³³ Qur'an, 28:77, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/28/77>

³⁴ Dolan, Eric W. "How Parents Act on Their Religious Beliefs Linked to the Onset of Atheism in Their Children." *PsyPost*. August 26, 2018. Accessed October 05, 2018. <https://www.psypost.org/2018/08/how-parents-act-on-their-religious-beliefs-linked-to-the-onset-of-atheism-in-their-children-52058>.

³⁵ "Anas bin Malik narrated that a man said: 'O Messenger of Allah! Shall I tie it [my camel] and rely (upon Allah), or leave it loose and rely (upon Allah)?' He said: 'Tie it and rely (upon Allah),'” *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, *Hasan*, Vol. 4, Book 11, Hadith 2517, <https://sunnah.com/urn/678230>

and places great emphasis on the power of prayer as part of having faith and placing one's trust in Allah. The outcome is ultimately with Allah alone as proven in the powerful examples of the most righteous and noble parents who were tested with these very challenges such as Nuh and Yaqub عليهما السلام. In the case of the former, the son went astray, while in the case of the latter, the sons ultimately redeemed themselves.³⁶

Among the many blessings and wisdoms of being tested in life is that Allah tests His beloved servants in order to bring them closer to Him, to reward them, to raise them in rank, and to make that very test a means of forgiveness. The Prophet ﷺ said, "No fatigue, nor disease, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor hurt, nor distress befalls a Muslim, even if it were the prick he receives from a thorn, but that Allah expiates some of his sins for that."³⁷ Both one's provision and its removal are manifestations of divine Wisdom and blessings through which parents are tested for their gratitude and perseverance.³⁸ Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: "Strange are the ways of a believer for there is good in every affair of his and this is not the case with anyone else except in the case of a believer for if he has an occasion to feel delight, he thanks (God), thus there is a good for him in it, and if he gets into trouble and shows resignation (and endures it patiently), there is a good for him in it."³⁹ Allah reassures the believers that they are never alone and abandoned, and He instructs them to seek help through patience and prayer.⁴⁰ This is the power of supplication (*du'a*) and placing one's trust in Allah as exemplified in the comprehensive and eloquent supplications in the Qur'an and Sunnah.

*And those who say, 'Our Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous.'*⁴¹

³⁶ Qur'an, 11:42-49, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/11/42-49>, also 2:133-136, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/2/133-136>

³⁷ *Sahih al-Bukhari* 5641, 5642 <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/75/2>

³⁸ Hamdan, Aisha. *Nurturing Eemân in Children*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House. https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Nurturing_iman_In_Children.pdf, pp. 38-42

³⁹ *Sahih Muslim* 2999 <https://sunnah.com/muslim/55/82>

⁴⁰ Qur'an, 2:153, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/2/153>, "O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient."

⁴¹ Qur'an, 25:74, *Sahih International*, <https://quran.com/25/74>

The prophetic model as the solution for all times

The prophetic model offers us far more than a fourteen-hundred-year-old historic reference to a flourishing society built upon moral standards and the worship of the one true God. It not only represents the pinnacle of all Islamic ideals, including parenting goals and methodology, for Muslims all over the world but it also contains within it the solution for a life lived to its fullest potential—for all of humanity, for all times. Hence, the prophetic model provides us with the most effective, practical, and rewarding plan of action to ensure success in this world and the Hereafter.

Inculcating prophetic character traits

The Prophet ﷺ embodied the optimum qualities for all humans, and in this case, parents, to emulate. He taught and demonstrated conviction in his beliefs. The most crucial takeaway is that he led by example—firmly establishing that parent behavior and the correct modeling of faith is essential in order to instill faith in one's child. The Prophet ﷺ took a nurturing approach to his relationships, building trust and credibility as their foundation. He showed compassion and empathy while maintaining self-discipline and balance in all aspects of life, with consistency and *ihsan* in his own actions and allowance for ease when it came to the actions of others. It is well-documented that he was particularly kind and affectionate toward children.⁴² He was known to be loving and respectful, not only to his own children and grandchildren, but to all children. The most comprehensive point we can take from the prophetic model is that of his investing his time and attention in those around him—adults and children alike. Every encounter with him became a means of his imparting some benefit, even if it was a smile to bring about happiness, ease, or relief. Every individual was made to realize his or her importance and left the company of the Prophet ﷺ feeling loved, uplifted, and empowered, both spiritually and practically. This authentic and beautiful demonstration of Islam had a powerful impact. It would become the basis of

⁴² Hamdan, Aisha. Nurturing Eemân in Children. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House. https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Nurturing_iman_In_Children.pdf, p. 180

countless numbers of people wholeheartedly entering Islam and the establishment of faith and of lasting bonds with individuals, and in turn, entire communities. The Prophet ﷺ endured the weight of the world as the final Messenger of Allah and as the first head of state for the Muslim world yet he made time to greet children and to play with them. His grandsons would ride his shoulders and he would frequently embrace them.

*Abu Huraira reported that al-Aqra' b. Habis saw Allah's Apostle ﷺ kissing Hasan. He said: I have ten children, but I have never kissed any one of them, whereupon Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: He who does not show mercy (towards his children), no mercy would be shown to him.*⁴³

The Prophetic model of teaching

The prophetic model of teaching is yet another discussion in and of itself.⁴⁴ Among its techniques and boundless wisdom is the compassionate and measured approach to inculcating upright behavior. This is illustrated through the gradual legislation and establishment of a number of religious obligations such as prayer (*salah*),⁴⁵ charity (*sadaqah* and *zakah*), fasting (*saum*), and the pilgrimage (*Hajj*). The Qur'anic verses in regard to the prohibition of intoxicants, for example, were divinely revealed in a systematic way to lead the early Muslims to successful and sustainable implementation of its final ruling, through establishing faith and conviction, and without placing undue hardship on a society that had been accustomed to consuming alcohol prior to Islam.⁴⁶

Additionally, the Prophet ﷺ used storytelling and parables as effective means of teaching and communication.⁴⁷ He was known to repeat particular instructions in order to reinforce their importance. Viable alternatives were offered to redirect toward correct behavior, to facilitate ease, and to avoid embarrassment. Above all,

⁴³ *Sahih Muslim* 2318 a <https://sunnah.com/muslim/43/86>

⁴⁴ Hamdan, Aisha. *Nurturing Eemân in Children*. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House. https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Nurturing_iman_In_Children.pdf, pp. 73-76

⁴⁵ The early Muslims prayed in the morning and evening until the five daily prayers were made obligatory during the Night Journey and Ascension, *Sahih al-Bukhari* 349, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/8>

⁴⁶ See Qur'an, 2:219, 4:43, 5:90 and *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, <http://www.recitequran.com/tafsir/en.ibn-kathir/5:90>

⁴⁷ Muslim, Book 1, Hadith 429, Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "The five daily *Salat* (prayers) are like a great river running by your door in which you take a bath five times a day, <https://sunnah.com/riyadussaliheen/1/429>

the Prophet ﷺ was uniquely blessed with a level of emotional intelligence that enabled him to interact with each individual in terms of what was best suited for that person, at that time, in order to bring about the greatest benefit to that individual.⁴⁸ It must be highlighted that the Prophet ﷺ exhibited remarkable patience in dealing with people—even those who ardently opposed him.

The Prophetic methodology of correcting and advising

The Prophetic methodology of correcting the behavior of others is anchored in sincerity to Allah.⁴⁹ As was mentioned above in regard to the need for consistency between one's beliefs and actions, sincerity is a prerequisite for parents in terms of their own behavior and when attempting to correct or to advise (*naseeha*) their children. Numerous examples from the *seerah* of the Prophet ﷺ detail the recognition and allowance for the fallibility of all humans. Much can be gleaned from the Prophet's ﷺ nuanced approach to people based on his relationship with them. How he corrected a senior Companion was different from how he corrected a Bedouin who lacked knowledge. We can summarize the prophetic methodology of correcting and advising with the Prophet's ﷺ impeccable abilities when it came to his principles of fairness, distinction between major and minor mistakes, avoiding the greater harm in a given situation, and critiquing the mistake without denouncing the individual. Care was given to conceal the faults of others and to pray for his *ummah* to be rightly guided and forgiven.

Planting the seeds of faith

All of these techniques ultimately became the means for the Prophet ﷺ to achieve his greatest goal—that of planting the seeds of faith within the hearts of the people and effectively connecting them to Allah. This is further confirmed through his wisdom in focusing primarily on imparting the basics of *imaan* and nurturing it

⁴⁸ See

https://yaqeeninstitute.org/mikaeel-ahmed-smith/shame-morality-and-emotions-understanding-the-prophetic-model-of-intelligence/#.XPO-29OpE_U

⁴⁹ Al-Munajjid, Muhammed Salih, Sh. The Prophet's Methods for Correcting People's Mistakes.

www.islamhouse.com,2005.https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ih_books/single/en_Correcting_People_Mistakes.pdf, pp. 4, 13-15,17-21,28,35,39,43,62,103.

within the new Muslims for thirteen years in Makkah until it became firmly rooted in their hearts, before obligating them to uphold the legalities, which were not revealed by Allah in large part until after the migration to Madinah. No doubt, establishing a strong connection with Allah is the primary goal of every parent and the means to successfully instilling faith in children. Thus, one of the fundamental narrations we have is that of the recollection of the Prophet's ﷺ Companion, Abdullah ibn Al-Abbas, a young boy at the time, who said:

*One day I was riding behind the Prophet when he said, “O lad, be mindful of Allah and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you shall find Him with you. When you ask (for anything), ask it from Allah, and if you seek help, seek help from Allah.”*⁵⁰

Conclusion

The atheism study emphasizes the critical need for parents to be cognizant of their behavior at all times—particularly in regard to how they act on their religious beliefs. The Islamic approach to parenting not only confirms the correlation between parent behavior and the outcome of faith in the child, but it also provides the optimal solution to nurture faith and safeguard against its loss. The primary goal of parents is to actively instill faith in their children. This is best achieved when parents acquire the correct knowledge of Islam and have a comprehensive understanding of the roles and responsibilities Allah has assigned to them. Seeking the support of external resources where needed and like-minded company is a necessary and practical application of the Islamic approach to parenting. It is also important to be aware of the challenges facing Muslims today in order to safeguard against them and overcome them—particularly those that contribute to doubt and abandonment of faith in our increasingly secular surroundings. Furthermore, it is paramount for parents to spend quality time with their children and create an environment at home that fosters healthy and open communication between parent and child. The prophetic model provides the ideal roadmap for how to achieve these goals such that the child will actively look to the parent for guidance and answers, and willingly respond in accordance to their natural disposition toward

⁵⁰ *At-Tirmidhi*, 1931, *Hasan Sahih*.

faith and belief—the *fitrah*. Ultimately, this approach allows both parent and child to learn and grow together in their respective roles as confident Muslims who are equipped to nurture and benefit one another, and to contribute to society at large. Finally, making one’s home a sanctuary where the remembrance of Allah is abundant is essential for every believer and likewise for every parent looking to instill faith in their child. In fact, it is essential to hope, to placing one’s trust in Allah, and to life itself. The Prophet ﷺ said: “*The house in which remembrance of Allah is made and the house in which Allah is not remembered are like the living and the dead.*”⁵¹

⁵¹ *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith 779, <https://sunnah.com/muslim/6/251>